

PS 1742  
.C5  
1903  
Copy 1

A Christmas  
Wreath



By <sup>a</sup> Richard  
Watson Gilder



Class PS 1742

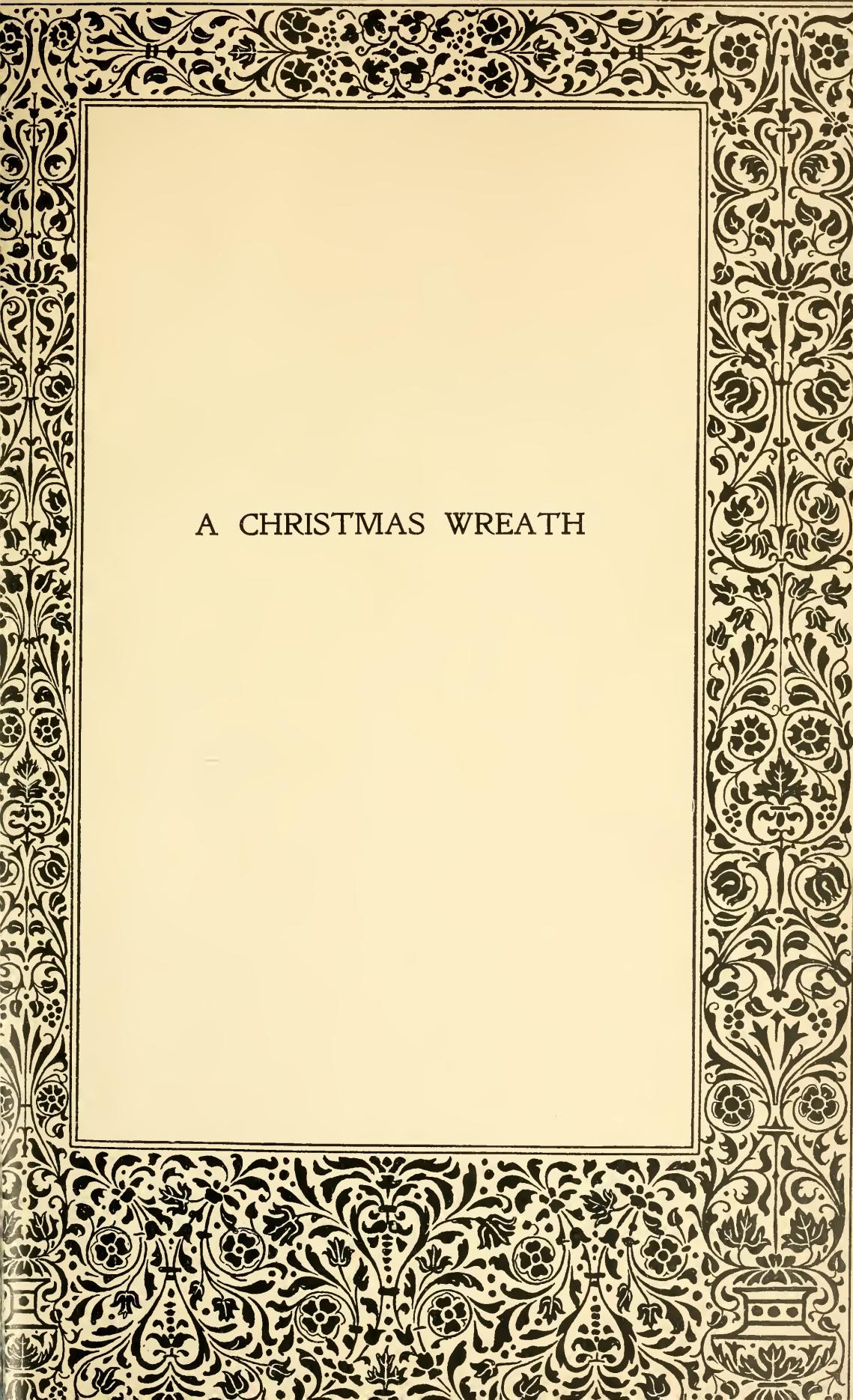
Book C 5

Copyright N<sup>o</sup>. 1903

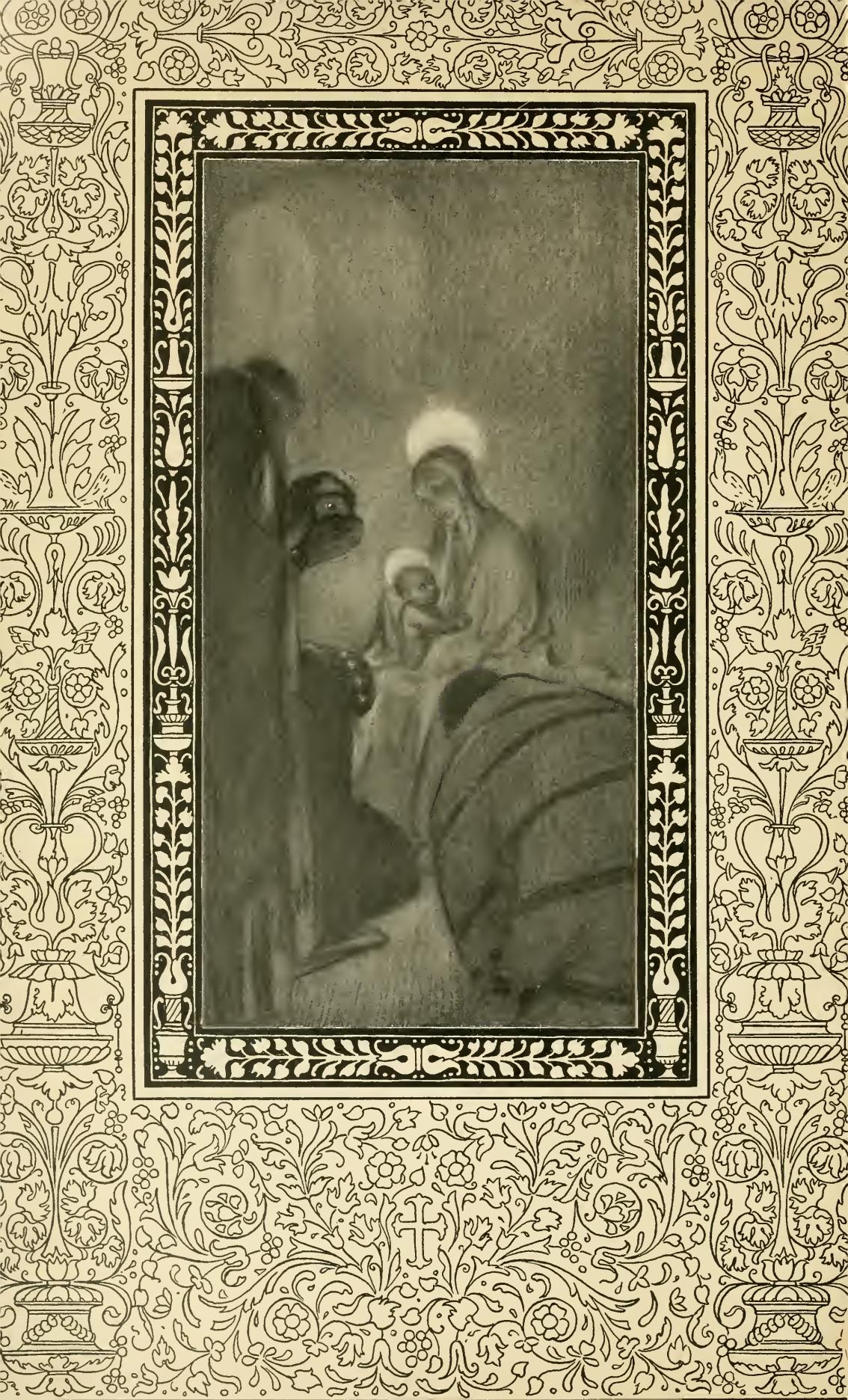
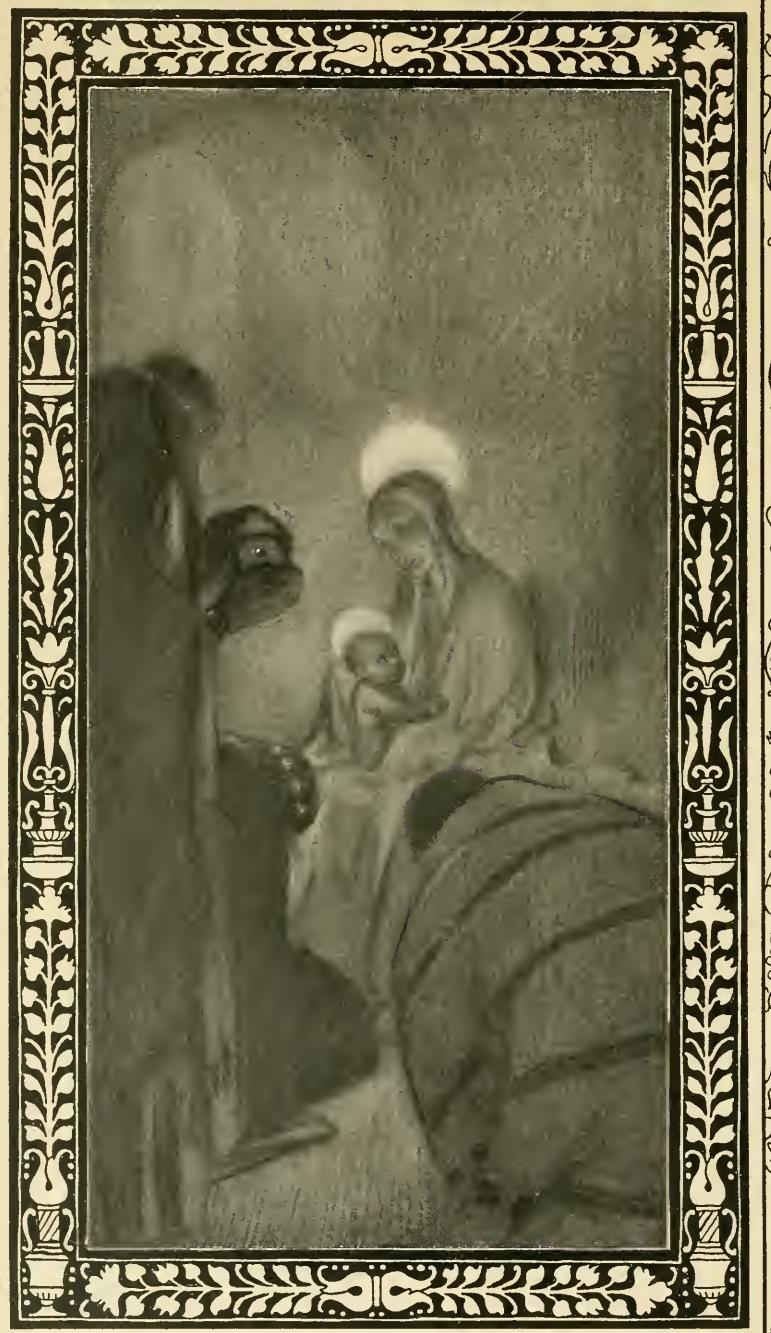
COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.







A CHRISTMAS WREATH

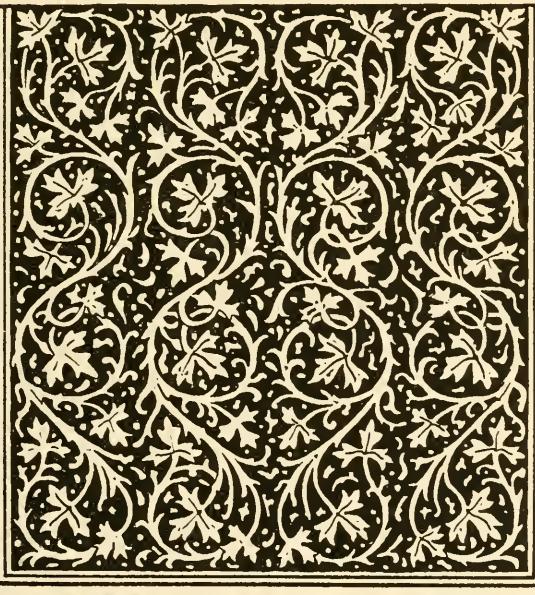


A  
CHRISTMAS WREATH

BY RICHARD WATSON GILDER  
WITH PICTURES AND DESIGNS  
BY HENRY MCCARTER \* \* \*



NEW YORK : THE CENTURY CO.



PS 1742  
C 5 1903

Copyright, 1880, 1881, 1885, 1887, 1891,  
1892, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1897, 1898, 1899,  
1900, 1901, 1903,  
BY RICHARD WATSON GILDER.

All rights reserved.

THE DEVINNE PRESS.

## PRELUDE

PAGE

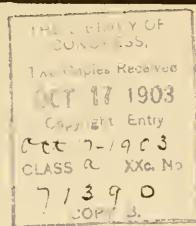
The Song of a Heathen . . . . .	6
---------------------------------	---

## PART I

A Christmas Hymn . . . . .	7
Noël . . . . .	9
The Birds of Bethlehem . . . . .	10
A Madonna of Fra Lippo Lippi . . . . .	11
The Old Master . . . . .	12
The Christ-Child . . . . .	13
The Anger of Christ . . . . .	14
Cost . . . . .	16
"There is Nothing New Under the Sun" . . . . .	17
Holy Land . . . . .	19
Easter . . . . .	20
"The Supper at Emmaus" . . . . .	22
Egypt and Syria . . . . .	23

## PART II

Two Worlds . . . . .	25
The Word of the White Tsar . . . . .	26
On a Portrait of Servetus . . . . .	28
"Despise Not Thou" . . . . .	29
Credo . . . . .	30
The Passing of Christ . . . . .	32
The Doubter . . . . .	35
In Palestine . . . . .	36



## PRELUDE

### THE SONG OF A HEATHEN

SOJOURNING IN GALILEE, A. D. 32

#### I



If Jesus Christ is a man,—  
And only a man,—I say  
That of all mankind I cleave to him,  
And to him will I cleave alway.

#### II

If Jesus Christ is a God,—  
And the only God,—I swear  
I will follow him through heaven and hell,  
The earth, the sea, and the air!

# PART I

## A CHRISTMAS HYMN

### I



ELL me, what is this innumerable throng  
Singing in the heavens a loud, angelic song?  
*These are they who come with swift and  
shining feet  
From round about the throne of God the Lord of  
Light to greet.*

### II

Oh, who are these that hasten beneath the starry sky,  
As if with joyful tidings that through the world shall  
fly?  
*The faithful shepherds these, who greatly were  
afeared  
When, as they watched their flocks by night, the  
heavenly host appeared.*

### III

Who are these that follow across the hills of night  
A star that westward hurries along the fields of light?  
*Three wise men from the East who myrrh and  
treasure bring  
To lay them at the feet of him their Lord and  
Christ and King.*

IV

What babe new-born is this that in a manger cries?  
Near on her bed of pain his happy mother lies.

*Oh, see! the air is shaken with white and heavenly wings —*

*This is the Lord of all the earth, this is the King of kings.*

V

Tell me, how may I join in this holy feast  
With all the kneeling world, and I of all the least?

*Fear not, O faithful heart, but bring what most is meet :*

*Bring love alone, true love alone, and lay it at his feet.*

## NOËL

### I

Star-dust and vaporous light,—  
The mist of worlds unborn,—  
A shuddering in the awful night  
Of winds that bring the morn.

### II

Now comes the dawn: the circling earth;  
Creatures that fly and crawl;  
And Man, that last, imperial birth;  
And Christ, the flower of all.

## THE BIRDS OF BETHLEHEM

### I

I heard the bells of Bethlehem ring—  
Their voice was sweeter than the priests';  
I heard the birds of Bethlehem sing  
Unbidden in the churchly feasts.

### II

They clung and sung on the swinging chain  
High in the dim and incensed air;  
The priests, with repetitions vain,  
Chanted a never-ending prayer.

### III

So bell and bird and priest I heard,  
But voice of bird was most to me;  
It had no ritual, no word,  
And yet it sounded true and free.

### IV

I thought Child Jesus, were he there,  
Would like the singing birds the best,  
And clutch his little hands in air  
And smile upon his mother's breast.

## A MADONNA OF FRA LIPPO LIPPI

### I

No heavenly maid we here behold,  
Though round her brow a ring of gold;  
This baby, solemn-eyed and sweet,  
Is human all from head to feet.

### II

Together close her palms are prest  
In worship of that godly guest;  
But glad her heart and unafraid  
While on her neck his hand is laid.

### III

Two children, happy, laughing, gay,  
Uphold the little child in play;  
Not flying angels these, what though  
Four wings from their four shoulders grow.

### IV

Fra Lippo, we have learned from thee  
A lesson of humanity;  
To every mother's heart forlorn,  
In every house the Christ is born.

## THE OLD MASTER

Of his dear Lord he pictured all the life,  
But not that ancient land, nor the old days;  
Not curious he to seek, through learnèd strife,  
The look of those far times and unknown ways.  
But in his solemn and long-living art  
Well did he paint that which can never die:  
The life and passion of the human heart,  
Unchanged while sorrowing age on age goes by.  
Beneath his brush his own loved people grew,  
Their rivers and their mountains, saints and lords,  
The dark Italian mothers whom he knew,  
The sad-eyed nuns, the warriors with drawn swords;  
And the young Saviour, throned at Mary's breast,  
Was but some little child whom he loved best.

# THE CHRIST-CHILD

A PICTURE BY FRANK VINCENT DU MOND

## I

Done is the day of care.  
Into the shadowy room  
Flows the pure evening light,  
To stem the gathering gloom,  
The lily's flame illume,  
And the bowed heads make bright—  
The heads bowed low in prayer.

## II

See how the level rays  
Through the white garments pour  
Of the holy child, who stands,  
With bending brow, to implore  
Grace on the toilers' store;  
Oh, see those sinless hands !  
Behold, the Christ-child prays !

## III

Wait, wait, ye lingering rays,  
Stand still, O Earth and Sun,  
Draw near, thou Soul of God—  
This is the suffering one !  
Already the way is begun  
The piercèd Saviour trod ;  
And now the Christ-child prays,  
The holy Christ-child prays.

## THE ANGER OF CHRIST

PALM SUNDAY

### I

On the day that Christ ascended  
To Jerusalem,  
Singing multitudes attended,  
And the very heavens were rended  
With the shout of them.

### II

Chanted they a sacred ditty,  
Every heart elate;  
But he wept in brooding pity,  
Then went in the holy city  
By the Golden Gate.

### III

In the temple, lo! what lightning  
Makes unseemly rout!  
He in anger, sudden, frightening,  
Drives with scorn and scourge the whitening  
Money-changers out.

IV

By the way that Christ descended  
From Mount Olivet,  
I, a lonely pilgrim, wended,  
On the day his entry splendid  
Is remembered yet.

V

And I thought : If he, returning  
On this festival,  
Here should haste with love and yearning,  
Where would now his fearful, burning  
Anger flash and fall ?

VI

In the very house they builded  
To his saving name,  
'Mid their altars, gemmed and gilded,  
Would his scourge and scorn be wielded,  
His fierce lightning flame.

VII

Once again, O Man of Wonder,  
Let thy voice be heard !  
Speak as with a sound of thunder ;  
Drive the false thy roof from under ;  
Teach thy priests thy word.

## COST

Because Heaven's cost is Hell, and perfect joy  
Hurts as hurts sorrow; and because we win  
Some boon of grace with the dread cost of sin,  
Or suffering born of sin; because the alloy  
Of blood but makes the bliss of victory brighter;  
Because true worth hath surest proof herein,  
That it should be reproached, and called akin  
To evil things—black making white the whiter;  
Because no cost seems great near this—that He  
Should pay the ransom wherewith we were  
priced;  
And none could name a darker infamy  
Than that a God was spit upon,—enticed,  
By those He came to save, to the accursèd tree,—  
For this I know that Christ indeed is Christ.

## “THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN”

### I

There is nothing new under the sun;  
There is no new hope or despair;  
The agony just begun  
Is as old as the earth and the air.  
My secret soul of bliss  
Is one with the singing stars,  
And the ancient mountains miss  
No hurt that my being mars.

### II

I know as I know my life,  
I know as I know my pain,  
That there is no lonely strife,  
That he is mad who would gain  
A separate balm for his woe,  
A single pity and cover;  
The one great God I know  
Hears the same prayer over and over.

### III

I know it because at the portal  
Of Heaven I bowed and cried,  
And I said : "Was ever a mortal  
Thus crowned and crucified !  
My praise thou hast made my blame ;  
My best thou hast made my worst ;  
My good thou hast turned to shame ;  
My drink is a flaming thirst."

### IV

But scarce my prayer was said  
Ere from that place I turned ;  
I trembled, I hung my head,  
My cheek, shame-smitten, burned ;  
For there where I bowed down  
In my boastful agony,  
I thought of thy cross and crown —  
O Christ ! I remembered thee.

## HOLY LAND

This is the earth he walked on; not alone  
That Asian country keeps the sacred stain;  
Ah, not alone the far Judean plain,  
Mountain and river! Lo, the sun that shone  
On him, shines now on us; when day is gone  
The moon of Galilee comes forth again  
And lights our path as his; an endless chain  
Of years and sorrows makes the round world one.  
The air we breathe, he breathed—the very air  
That took the mold and music of his high  
And godlike speech. Since then shall mortal dare  
With base thought front the ever-sacred sky—  
Soil with foul deed the ground whereon he laid  
In holy death his pale, immortal head!

## EASTER

### I

When in the starry gloom  
They sought the Lord Christ's tomb,  
Two angels stood in sight  
All dressed in burning white  
Who unto the women said:  
"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

### II

His life, his hope, his heart,  
With death they had no part;  
For this those words of scorn  
First heard that holy morn,  
When the waiting angels said:  
"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

### III

O, ye of this latter day,  
Who journey the selfsame way—  
Through morning's twilight gloom  
Back to the shadowy tomb;  
To you, as to them, was it said:  
"Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

IV

The Lord is risen indeed,  
He is here for your love, for your need—  
Not in the grave, nor the sky,  
But here where men live and die;  
And true the word that was said:  
“Why seek ye the living among the dead?”

V

Wherever are tears and sighs,  
Wherever are children’s eyes,  
Where man calls man his brother,  
And loves as himself another,  
Christ lives! The angels said:  
“Why seek ye the living among the dead?”

## “THE SUPPER AT EMMAUS”

A PICTURE BY REMBRANDT

Wise Rembrandt! thou couldst paint, and thou alone,  
Eyes that had seen what never human eyes  
Before had looked on; him that late had passed  
Onward and back through gates of Death and Life.

O human face where the celestial gleam  
Lingers! Oh, still to thee the eyes of men  
Turn with deep, questioning worship; seeing there,  
As in a mirror, the Eternal Light  
Caught from the shining of the central Soul  
Whence came all worlds, and whither shall return.

## EGYPT AND SYRIA

### EGYPT

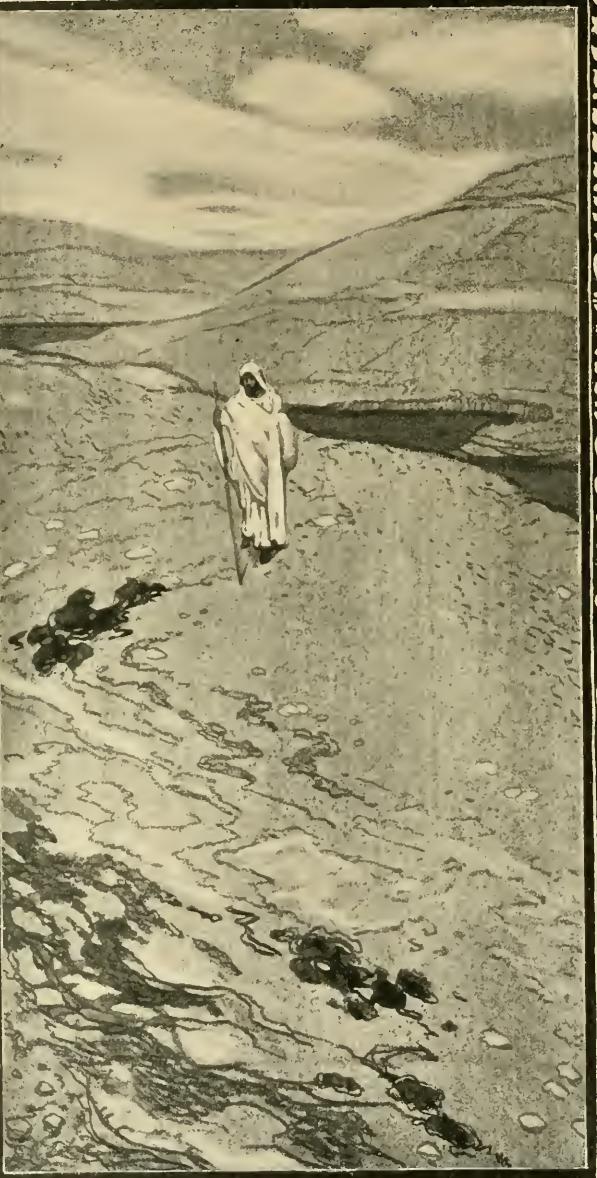
I thought, in Egypt, Death was more than Life,  
It seemed so vast ; its monuments so great ;  
The emptiness of tombs was such high state,—  
No living thought, or power, or potentate  
So glorious seemed, wrapt in such splendid gloom.  
For I perceived that in each ancient tomb,  
Long ages since, dead kings for Death made room.  
Not here the Dead, but Death :—alone, supreme :  
In Egypt Death was real,—Life a wing'd Dream.

### SYRIA

I thought, in Syria, Life was more than Death.  
A tomb there was forsaken of its dead,  
But death filled not the place; here with bowed head  
Worships the world forever at the tread  
Of one who lived, who liveth, and shall live,—  
Whose grave is but a footprint on the sod ;  
Men kiss the ground where living feet have trod.  
Here not to Death but Life, they worship give.  
August is Death, but this one tomb is rife  
With a more mighty presence ; it is Life.



PART II



PART II  
TWO WORLDS  
PAGAN—CHRISTIAN

I

THE VENUS OF MILO

**G**RACE, majesty, and the calm  
bliss of life;  
No conscious war 'twixt  
human will and duty;  
Here breathes, forever free from pain  
and strife,  
The old, untroubled pagan world of  
beauty.

II

MICHAEL ANGELO'S SLAVE

Of life, of death the mystery and woe,  
Witness in this mute, carven stone  
the whole.  
That suffering smile were never fash-  
ioned so  
Before the world had wakened to a  
soul.

# THE WORD OF THE WHITE TSAR

## A VISION OF CHRIST

This day, a strange and beautiful word was spoken,—  
Not with the voice of a child, nor the voice of a woman,  
Nor yet with the voice of a poet, the melody sounded,—  
Forth from the lips of a warrior, girt for the battle,  
Breathed this word of words o'er a world astonished.

Prisoners returning from war, and conquering armies,  
Navies flushed with new and amazing victory,  
Heard the message, so strange, so high, so entrancing,  
And soldiers dying of wounds or the wasting of fever.  
In tropic islands it sounded, through wrecks of cities;  
O'er burning plains where warlike death was in

waiting;

Armies and navies confronting, in watchful silence,  
Heard it and wondered; statesmen stopped their  
debates,

And turning their eyes toward the voice, with its  
meaning unlooked for,  
Listened and smiled with the smile and the sneer of  
the cynic.

But the mothers of youths who had died of their  
wounds and of fever,  
And the poor crushed down by the price of the glory  
of battle  
And the weight of the wars that have been, and that  
yet are preparing,  
They from their burdens looked up and uttered their  
blessing :  
For Peace—the Peace of God—was the warrior's  
prayer!

And I, who heard, I saw in a waking vision  
An image familiar long to the hearts of mortals,—  
A face of trouble, a brow celestial, yet human,—  
In a dream of the day, I saw that suffering spirit,  
Him accustomed to labor, to anguish not alien,  
Still mourning for men alone in the valley of  
shadows;—  
I dreamed that he lifted that face of infinite sorrow,  
And harkened,—when lo! a light in those eyes of  
sadness  
Came sudden as day that breaks from the mountains  
of Moab.

## ON A PORTRAIT OF SERVETUS

Thou grim and haggard wanderer, who dost look  
With haunting eyes forth from the narrow page,  
I know what fires consumed with inward rage  
Thy broken frame, what tempests chilled and shook !  
Ah, could not thy remorseless foeman brook  
Time's sure devourment, but must needs assuage  
His anger in thy blood, and blot the age  
With that dark crime which virtue's semblance took !  
Servetus ! that which slew thee lives to-day,  
Though in new forms it taints our modern air ;  
Still in heaven's name the deeds of hell are done ;  
Still on the high-road, 'neath the noonday sun,  
The fires of hate are lit for them who dare  
Follow their Lord along the untrodden way.

## “DESPISE NOT THOU”

Despise not thou thy father's ancient creed,  
Of his pure life it was the golden thread  
Whereon bright days were gathered, bead by bead,  
Till death laid low that dear and reverend head.  
From olden faith how many a glorious deed  
Hath lit the world; its blood-stained banner led  
The martyrs heavenward; yea, it was the seed  
Of knowledge, whence our modern freedom spread.  
Not always has man's *credo* proved a snare—  
But a deliverance, a sign, a flame  
To purify the dense and pestilent air,  
Writing on pitiless heavens one pitying name;  
And 'neath the shadow of the dread eclipse  
It shines on dying eyes and pallid lips.

## CREDO

How easily my neighbor chants his creed,  
Kneeling beside me in the House of God.  
His "I believe" he chants, and "I believe,"  
With cheerful iteration and consent—  
Watching meantime the white, slow sunbeam move  
Across the aisle, or listening to the bird  
Whose free, wild song sounds through the open door.

Thou God supreme,—I too, I too, believe !  
But oh ! forgive if this one human word,  
Binding the deep and breathless thought of thee  
And my own conscience with an iron band,  
Stick in my throat. I cannot say it, thus—  
This "I believe" that doth thyself obscure ;  
This rod to smite ; this barrier ; this blot  
On thy most unimaginable face  
And soul of majesty.

'T is not man's faith  
In thee that he proclaims in echoed phrase,  
But faith in man ; faith not in thine own Christ,

But in another man's dim thought of him.  
Christ of Judea, look thou in my heart!  
Do I not love thee, look to thee, in thee  
Alone have faith of all the sons of men—  
Faith deepening with the weight and woe of years?

Pure soul and tenderest of all that came  
Into this world of sorrow, hear my prayer:

Lead me, yea, lead me deeper into life,  
This suffering, human life wherein thou liv'st  
And breathest still, and hold'st thy way divine.  
'T is here, O pitying Christ, where thee I seek,  
Here where the strife is fiercest; where the sun  
Beats down upon the highway thronged with men,  
And in the raging mart. Oh! deeper lead  
My soul into the living world of souls  
Where thou dost move.

But lead me, Man Divine,  
Where'er thou will'st, only that I may find  
At the long journey's end thy image there,  
And grow more like to it. For art not thou  
The human shadow of the infinite Love  
That made and fills the endless universe!  
The very Word of him, the unseen, unknown  
Eternal Good that rules the summer flower  
And all the worlds that people starry space!

## THE PASSING OF CHRIST

### I

O Man of light and lore !  
Do you mean that in our day  
The Christ hath passed away ;  
That nothing now is divine  
In the fierce rays that shine  
Through every cranny and thought ;  
That Christ as he once was taught  
Shall be the Christ no more ?  
That the Hope and Saviour of men  
Shall be seen no more again ;  
That, miracles being done,  
Gone is the Holy One ?  
And thus, you hold, this Christ  
For the past alone sufficed ;  
From the throne of the hearts of the world  
The Son of God shall be hurled,  
And henceforth must be sought  
New prophets and kings of thought ;  
That the tenderest, truest word  
The heart of sorrow hath heard  
Shall sound no more upon earth ;  
That he who hath made of birth  
A dread and holy rite ;  
Who hath brought to the eyes of death

A vision of heavenly light,  
Shall fade with our failing faith;—  
He who saw in children's eyes  
Eternal paradise;  
Who looked through shame and sin  
At the sanctity within;  
Whose memory, since he died,  
The earth hath sanctified—  
Hath been the stay and the hold  
Of millions of lives untold,  
And the world on its upward path  
Hath led from crime and wrath;—  
You say that this Christ hath passed  
And we cannot hold him fast?

II

Ah no! If the Christ you mean  
Shall pass from this time, this scene,  
These hearts, these lives of ours,  
'T is but as the summer flowers  
Pass, but return again,  
To gladden a world of men.  
For he,—the only, the true,—  
In each age, in each waiting heart,  
Leaps into life anew;  
Though he pass, he shall not depart.  
Behold him now where he comes!  
Not the Christ of our subtle creeds,  
But the lord of our hearts, of our homes,  
Of our hopes, our prayers, our needs;

The brother of want and blame,  
The lover of women and men,  
With a love that puts to shame  
All passions of mortal ken;—  
Yet of all of woman born  
His is the scorn of scorn;  
Before whose face do fly  
Lies, and the love of a lie;  
Who from the temple of God,  
And the sacred place of laws,  
Drives forth, with smiting rod,  
The herds of ravening maws.

'T is he, as none other can,  
Makes free the spirit of man,  
And speaks, in darkest night,  
One word of awful light  
That strikes through the dreadful pain  
Of life, a reason sane—  
That word divine which brought  
The universe from nought.

Ah no, thou life of the heart,  
Never shalt thou depart!  
Not till the leaven of God  
Shall lighten each human clod;  
Not till the world shall climb  
To thy height serene, sublime,  
Shall the Christ who enters our door  
Pass to return no more.

## THE DOUBTER

### I

Thou Christ, my soul is hurt and bruised!  
With words the scholars wear me out;  
My brain o'erwearied and confused,—  
Thee, and myself, and all I doubt.

### II

And must I back to darkness go  
Because I cannot say their creed?  
I know not what I think; I know  
Only that thou art what I need.

## IN PALESTINE

### I

Ah no! that sacred land  
Where fell the wearied feet of the lone Christ  
Robs not the soul of faith. I shall set down  
The thought was in my heart. If that hath lost  
Aught of its child-belief, 't was long ago,  
Not there in Palestine; and if 't were lost,  
He were a coward who should fear to lose  
A blind, hereditary, thoughtless faith,—  
Comfort of fearful minds, a straw to catch at  
On the deep-gulfed and tempest-driven sea.

Full well I know how shallow spirits lack  
The essence, flinging from them but the form;  
I have seen souls lead barren lives and cursed,—  
Bereft of light, and all the grace of life,—  
Because for them the inner truth was lost  
In the frail symbol—hated, shattered, spurned.

But faith that lives forever is not bound  
To any outward semblance, any scheme  
Fine-wrought of human wonder, or self-love,  
Or the base fear of never-ending pain.

True faith doth face the blackness of despair,—  
Blank faithlessness itself; bravely it holds  
To duty unrewarded and unshared;  
It loves where all is loveless; it endures  
In the long passion of the soul for God.

'T was thus I thought:—  
At last the very land whose breath he breathed,  
The very hills his bruised feet did climb!  
This is his Olivet; on this Mount he stood,  
As I do now, and with this same surprise  
Straight down into the startling blue he gazed  
Of the fair, turquoise mid-sea of the plain.  
That long, straight, misty, dream-like, violet wall  
Of Moab,—lo, how close it looms; the same  
Quick, human wonder struck his holy vision.  
About these feet the flowers he knew so well.  
Back where the city's shadow slowly climbs  
There is a wood of olives gaunt and gray,  
And centuries old; it holds the name it bore  
That night of agony and bloody sweat.

I tell you when I looked upon these fields  
And stony valleys,—through the purple veil  
Of twilight, or what time the Orient sun  
Made shining jewels of the barren rocks,—  
Something within me trembled; for I said:  
This picture once was mirrored in his eyes;  
This sky, that lake, those hills, this loveliness,

To him familiar were; this is the way  
To Bethany; the red anemones  
Along yon wandering path mark the steep road  
To green-embowered Jordan. All is his:  
These leprous outcasts pleading piteously;  
This troubled country,—troubled then as now,  
And wild and bloody,—this is his own land.  
On such a day, girdled by these same hills,  
Pressed by this dark-browed, sullen, Orient crowd,  
On yonder mount, spotted with crimson blooms,  
He closed his eyes, in that dark tragedy  
Which mortal spirit never dared to sound.

O God! I saw those haunting eyes in every throng.

## II

Were he divine, and maker of all worlds,  
The Godhead veiled in suffering, for our sins,—  
An unimagined splendor poured on earth  
In sacrifice supreme,—this were a scene  
Fit for the tears of angels and all men.  
If he were man,—a passionate human heart,  
Like unto ours, but with intenser fire,  
And whiter from the deep and central glow;  
Who loved all men as never man before,  
Who felt as never mortal all the weight  
Of this world's sorrow, and whose sinless hands  
Upstretched in prayer did seem, indeed, to clutch  
The hand divine; if he were man, yet dreamed  
That the Ineffable through him had power—

JUL 17 1903

Even through his touch—to scatter human pain  
(Setting the eternal seal on his high hope  
And promised kingdom); were he only man,  
Thus, thus to aspire, and thus at last to fall!  
Such anguish! such betrayal! Who could paint  
That tragedy! one human, piteous cry—  
“Forsaken!”—and black death! If he were God,  
'T was for an instant only, his despair;  
Or were he man, and there is life beyond,  
And, soon or late, the good rewarded are,  
Then, too, is recompense.

But were he man,  
And death ends all; then was that tortured death  
On Calvary a thing to make the pulse  
Of memory quail and stop.

The blackest thought  
The human brain may harbor comes that way.  
Face that,—face all,—yet lose not hope nor heart!  
One perfect moment in the life of love,  
One deed wherein the soul unselfed gleams forth,—  
These can outmatch all ill, all doubt, all fear,  
And through the encompassing burden of the world  
Burn swift the spirit's pathway to its God.





